



Advent Prayer Guide

UPDATED FOR 2023

**SILENT
NIGHT**

**VOICES OF THE MIDDLE EAST
AND NORTH AFRICA**

The voices of the Middle East and North Africa

INTRODUCTION

“Silent night, holy night! All is calm, all is bright.” These are familiar words to many of us.

They beautifully set the scene for what was happening that night as Jesus came into the world. Silence had fallen in a lowly stable; the rush to find a place to lay had been accomplished; Jesus was born and the calm before the storm fell upon the world. What a moment.

Jesus’ life after that would certainly not be silent. It was a life full of joy, trials, adversity, friendship and deep sacrifice. Jesus couldn’t stay silent, and he raised his voice to speak into the lives of others, raising them out of the darkness. He spoke to those who were oppressed, outcast, hurting and lost. Jesus gave a voice to the people he met, freeing them from all kinds of situations – speaking life into them.

This Advent season, we will focus on the voices of believers in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). Many in these countries are silenced by society, religious leaders and officials; sometimes by their own families. We will pray specifically for four countries: Iran, Egypt, Algeria and Türkiye. Although persecution takes different forms in these countries, Christians in each place face restrictions on expressing and sharing their faith. We will celebrate that SAT-7’s multi-platform media ministry is giving

people across the MENA a voice. And we will pray for the continued work of SAT-7, which is bringing joy, showing love and strengthening faith.

Psalm 83:1 (NASB) says, “God, do not remain quiet; do not be silent and, God, do not be still.” As you begin, take a moment to ask God to speak to you about how to pray for the voiceless, the silent and the unheard. Praise God for what he’s doing through the ministry of SAT-7 and pause to seek God’s voice in our noisy world.

WHAT’S INSIDE?

We will spend one week looking at each of the four focus countries. In each section you will find:

- A **country profile** to help you familiarise yourself with the current situation for Christians in that nation
- Pertinent **prayer topics** that explore issues like religious freedom; authorities; treatment of women etc.
- A special feature article titled **“Voices from the Middle East & North Africa”**, written by a SAT-7 staff member, offering personal insight into that country’s cultural, political and religious circumstances
- A section called **“Volume On”**, which showcases a wonderful SAT-7 programme that is giving a voice to its viewers in that country
- A **Bible study** for personal or group use.

For details of our other Advent resources, see overleaf.

Viewer names changed and viewer images for representation only.

Check out the Silent Night resources

Find free family, group and church resources for Advent at sat7uk.org/advent-resources



Could you get your family, home group or even whole church involved in praying for and standing with believers in the Middle East and North Africa this Advent?

Our Silent Night resources will help you! They include family and group activities, Bible study materials, church prayers, presentations and videos.

SILENT NIGHT MUSIC CHALLENGE

Raise your voice this Advent with our Silent Night Christmas Challenge! Could you get a choir together to perform the song for your own church community or school – perhaps at a Christmas carol concert or assembly?

Everything you need, including backing track and sheet music, will be provided to ensure that everyone is in time and sings in the right key! If you record yourselves singing, make sure you send it to us for our Silent Night video wall.

Or you could show our international video version of Silent Night, available on the Advent website.



SAT-7's international recording of Silent Night - available on the Advent resources page

ADVENT PRAYER BOX

A creative and engaging activity for the whole family to help you pray together for Iran, Egypt, Algeria and Türkiye this Advent.

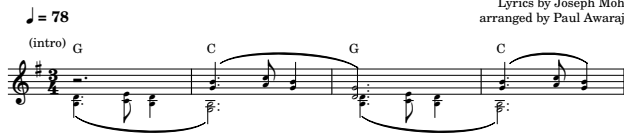
Decorate and fill a box with pictures and items that you associate with these four countries – we've got some ideas to help you – and learn about what life is like for Christians there as you pray.



SILENT NIGHT

SAT-7 SILENT NIGHT CHRISTMAS CHALLENGE 2023

composed by Franz Xaver Gruber
Lyrics by Joseph Mohr
arranged by Paul Awaraji



Iran

DECEMBER 1



AUTHORITIES

COUNTRY PROFILE



It is striking that Cyrus the Great, the founder of the first Persian Empire, was the ruler who allowed the Jews to return from exile and who drafted a declaration of religious

tolerance that was unprecedented in the ancient world. In modern times, Iran signed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 and is also, in theory, committed to religious freedom. The reality is very different. In fact, Iran seeks to enforce its interpretations of Shia Islam on almost all of its population.

- Four decades since the Iranian revolution have seen a move of God that has resulted in one of the fastest growing churches in the world. Research suggests that Iran has over one million Christians – even though they must mostly meet in secret.

- Christians who are active in witness face arrest, loss of employment, loss of their own or their children's education, imprisonment, internal exile and crippling fines, as authorities seek to stem the growth of the Iranian Church.

- Many converts have left Iran in order to be free to practise their faith and there is a rapidly growing diaspora Christian community.

The Iranian authorities clamp down hard on any form of perceived dissent from the country's Islamic regime. In September 2022, protests broke out in Iran following the death of a young woman in police custody, detained for allegedly not wearing the hijab properly. Under the slogan "Women. Life. Freedom", young women courageously removed and set fire to their headscarves, inspiring protests in many parts of the country, as well as in the U.S. and Europe. People of diverse religious, ethnic and cultural backgrounds came together on the streets in condemnation of police and regime brutality. During the protests, over 500 people, including children, were killed and many thousands arrested. The hardliners inside the regime have adopted the policy of using greater force and have introduced lengthy jail terms for women breaching hijab rules.

Pray for peace and justice for Iranians, and that restrictions on freedoms there will be lifted.



In 2022, protests broke out across Iran and spread to other parts of the world. Here, protesters in the U.S. take to the streets.



VOICES FROM THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

SILENT CELEBRATION

Written by Omeed Jouyandé from
SAT-7's Persian channel, SAT-7 PARS

The quietness and calm in Iran around Christmas time is not out of reverence for the Messiah whose birth was part of God's amazing plan of redemption for humanity. "We can't openly celebrate Christmas and sing Christmas songs here in Iran because of terrible oppression", shares Keyvan from Iran. "If we celebrate Christmas openly the government will find out and they will cause problems for us. So we don't have large gatherings and instead choose to keep in our family group."

Many believers are in a similar position and those whose families are not tolerant or sympathetic feel especially isolated at this time of the year. And yet, regardless of background or belief, ordinary Iranians love the Christmas lights and decorations that cheer up the darkest time of the year. As it happens, Christmas comes on the heels of a much-loved traditional festival on 21 December, Yalda's Eve, which celebrates light and the end of darkness.

A SAT-7 PARS viewer, Hormoz, observes: "More or less all Iranians see Christmas as a symbol of beauty and love. Alongside the table they set for Yalda's Eve, many also decorate a Christmas tree, adorn it with lights and lay out gifts."

Ironically, while Iranians who are not Christian

may openly enjoy the outward trappings and festivities of the season, for Muslim-background believers, celebrating Christmas involves significant risk. Any investigation by the authorities would soon reveal a believer's Christian faith and almost certainly lead to persecution.

Some believers are able to celebrate Christmas together with trusted friends or within families where every member has turned to Jesus. These believers can celebrate Christmas without fear of a neighbour, or even someone within the group, reporting them to the authorities. Mahnaz, a believer in Iran, wrote to share her experience of Christmas: "I made friends with a young man called Alireza who is a believer. We were able to celebrate Christmas and worship God together with a few others. All we have is from the Lord and we are grateful to Him."

Many like Dara rely on Christian content on SAT-7: "Of course we are unable to openly celebrate Christmas, but praise God for His kindness – we are able to celebrate Christmas with you and with our families in our home."

In the darkness of these times, the light of Christ and His message of peace, love and joy are captivating for growing numbers of Iranians. The God of Jesus Christ forgives sins at His own expense. He loves, redeems and saves the sinner and brings the believer to a place of repentance. He has promised joy to His people when He returns to establish His everlasting kingdom.

Arvand, a believer in Iran, writes: "Christmas for me is the symbol of reconciliation between the Lord, the Creator of all things, and humanity. I was lost and now I am found; I was in sin and through the Lord's intervention I have become a son. In Christ we are children of the King! What could be better?"

DECEMBER 2



MAZDAK, VIEWER FROM IRAN

“I have only been educated to the fifth-grade level, so I am not that literate, but the kindness of the Lord has been extended to me. I have been a believer for 12 years, and I can tell you that the believers in Iran have a real need to receive these worship songs and teaching clips from these dear pastors, to help us grow in our understanding of Christian theology.

You are far away, and you might think that the seeds you are spreading are going to be trampled, or they are falling on stony ground. But believe me, that is not so. Iran now is the good soil, and it needs to be seeded every day.

While we still breathe, we need to be fed daily with God’s Word. Over the last 12 years, I have had no access to a church, and it is through teaching clips from SAT-7 PARS and really good programmes like *Our Neighbourhood* and *Question Mark* that I have grown. You might think these have no impact, but believe me, these are transforming the home of a believer into a church.”

Give thanks for the impact of SAT-7 programmes in Mazdak’s life and pray that He will continue to grow in his faith.

DECEMBER 3



PERSECUTED CHRISTIANS

“If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it” (Matthew 16:24-25).

Christians in Iran carry Christ’s cross with them every day, choosing to follow Him despite rejection by family and friends, isolation, oppression, discrimination and persecution. Pray for our brothers and sisters in Iran that they will be renewed in their hope and faith in Jesus Christ, and that His love will overflow in their lives and, through them, into the lives of many others.

DECEMBER 4



A NEW GENERATION

Children, teens, and young adults are interacting with SAT-7 PARS’ programming and viewer support teams every day, expressing a joyful thirst to know more about Jesus and God’s Word. Pray for this new generation of Christians growing up in Iran; pray that God’s hand of protection will be over them and that He will guide them and equip them to be the changemakers of tomorrow. Pray for SAT-7 PARS programmes like *Golpand*, *Hashtag*, and *Church4Kids*, that they will continue to provide young viewers with fellowship and support, and help them to grow in their faith.

DECEMBER 5

Volume On



SANCTUARY OF THE HEART

Launched in June 2022, SAT-7 PARS' Instagram live programme responds to viewers increased requests for prayer and fellowship. "In Iran, churches are closed, and people have a need for prayer and for conversation," shares Ashraf (pictured below), presenter of *Sanctuary of the Heart*.

"Coming from different backgrounds, where prayer is often ritualistic or formulaic, our viewers are often unsure as to how to pray. Through *Sanctuary of the Heart*, we want to show viewers how to pray and

encourage them to pray for themselves and others. We want to open their eyes to the role of prayer in our daily lives, to challenge them, and to enter into a conversation with them so that they may be encouraged and will be able to encourage others as well."

The programme is also being watched by isolated and persecuted Christians in Afghanistan, highlighting the great spiritual need in the country. Arman*, a male viewer in Afghanistan recently commented, "Fellowshipping and appealing to the Lord together with other believers is so empowering. I am fed spiritually every week by joining *Sanctuary of the Heart* and I thank God that I have you in my life."

Pray that Sanctuary of the Heart will continue to touch the hearts and minds of viewers in Iran and Afghanistan. Pray for Ashraf as she presents the programme, that the Lord will give her wisdom and grace as she interacts with viewers.



DECEMBER 6



MARY'S VOICE

BIBLE STUDY

Read / Listen to Luke 1:26-38

Mary's voice is a powerful response. In a commentary on this passage, Dr. Amy Orr-Ewing says, "An ordinary, young, poor, oppressed woman gets to play a significant, breakthrough role in the redemption of the world. Evil will be crushed and defeated through her seed. Her body will play a part in showing the world that Jesus really is Immanuel – God with us."

In many countries across the MENA, women are much the same as Mary – young and oppressed. Through His choice of a woman like this, we can learn a lot about how God continues to work today: all He needs is faith and obedience.

We can be encouraged that God uses people of all ages, genders and backgrounds to bring about His Kingdom. Let's remember women and young girls just like Mary in the MENA as we reflect on this passage and pray for God to speak to them today.

REFLECTION

QUESTIONS

- 1 Mary responds to the Angel with such willingness and obedience. What can we learn from Mary's voice? How can we respond with faith like she did?
- 2 Mary is encouraged by God's work in her cousin Elizabeth's life. Can you think of a time when seeing or hearing of how God had acted in someone else's life helped you to trust Him more?
- 3 Is God calling you to something that seems impossible in your life right now, something that deserves a Mary-like response?

PRAY

Father, we thank you for Mary's faithfulness and obedience to your call upon her life. Help me to respond to You with the same faith. I pray for women in the MENA region who are just like Mary. I pray that they will hear your voice and respond to the love you have lavished on them. May they seek you, find you, serve you and love you this Advent season. Amen.

Egypt

COUNTRY PROFILE



Christians account for around ten per cent of the Egyptian population. The majority belong to the Coptic Orthodox Church. While the Egyptian constitution guarantees

freedom of belief and practice for Islam, Christianity, and Judaism – these freedoms are not equal in reality. For example, conversion to Islam is permitted, but not away from it, except in the case of those who were not originally born Muslim.

- Regulations that restrict the number and size of church buildings are also stricter than those for mosques. President El-Sisi has eased these, but prejudice still leads local governors to deny approval.
- Though the last year has been relatively peaceful, in the past Christians have experienced mob violence and been targeted by terrorists. Many churches were attacked after the 2013 overthrow of President Morsi.
- Traditional “reconciliation” sessions, sometimes used after attacks on Christians and their property, are rarely seen to deliver justice to Christian victims. On the positive side, the El-Sisi government is committed to preventing extremism and has various initiatives to promote religious tolerance.

DECEMBER 7



COMMUNITIES AND GOVERNMENT

Egypt’s government is openly positive about the Christian community but there is often a lack of law enforcement when it comes to acts against them, such as physical attacks, harassment and forcible displacement. Often, Christian communities are persecuted at a community level particularly in rural areas and are treated like second-class citizens. Pray for a greater tolerance and acceptance of Christians in Egypt by the state, communities and members of other religions.

DECEMBER 8



WOMEN

Christian women are amongst the most targeted in Egypt. They are a very vulnerable group and sometimes subjected to forced marriage, rape and forced conversion. Due to pressures to get married young, only 75% of Egypt’s women attend school, compared to 86% of Egypt’s men. Pray for breakthrough in the lives of Christian women in Egypt: pray that their voices will be heard; that their families would speak up for them and not be ashamed; and that change will come to each life.

DECEMBER 9

Volume On

KASR EL-DOBARA EVANGELICAL CHURCH SERVICES

Every Friday, people from across the Middle East can watch live services from thriving evangelical church Kasr El-Dobara (pictured below), based in Cairo.

These weekly broadcasts give a very public voice to the Egyptian Church in a place where it is frequently silenced by legal restrictions and violence. They also provide an amazing opportunity for isolated believers to join in worship and hear the word of the Lord, especially for those in places where meeting together physically can be dangerous or where there are no churches. The services are broadcast on SAT-7's Arabic channel, and are also available via the on-demand streaming service, SAT-7 PLUS.

Praise God for this live broadcast and pray especially for Kasr El-Dobara's Advent and Christmas services, that they will speak to many people about God's love in Christ at this special time of year.

DECEMBER 10

KARAM, VIEWER FROM EGYPT



“The best programme on SAT-7 is the Kasr El-Dobara live church meeting. The other spiritual programmes are also a blessing.

I am so grateful to the Lord that he uses this satellite channel to reach the unreached and our family because we have no church. I pray for abundant blessings to all the members of this channel, and those who support and fund. I pray for you to serve as God's witness to the nations, the ministers, and the audience all around the world. Stay safe along with your families.

God bless you in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Pray for this family as they watch SAT-7, that the Lord will continue to speak to them through the live church services and other programmes. Pray that other families who cannot attend a church will likewise be blessed through SAT-7's ministry.





VOICES FROM THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

Christians in Egypt are relatively free to live out their faith, and, though tensions simmer below the surface, we give thanks in the last year there have been fewer reports of violence against Christians. Here, Mary Joseph from SAT-7 Egypt shares a more immediate concern this Christmas – the economic hardship facing the country – and shows how SAT-7 is giving a voice to those who are struggling.



TIGHT CELEBRATIONS
Written by Mary Joseph
from SAT-7 EGYPT

With Advent comes the good news of Christ's incarnation and His miraculous birth. During this season Christians around the world prepare to celebrate the birth of Christ. Many Christians in Egypt celebrate by fasting for 40 days and then breaking their fast on Christmas Eve after a special service.

Churches hold events such as choir concerts, charity stalls, and children's activities in the two weeks before and after Christmas. But such celebrations are held only within the walls of church buildings. While the Egyptian government decorates certain affluent areas with lights and the occasional Christmas tree, it is only as a celebration of the New Year.

Christmas is a time of giving where many donate to the church and its affiliated organizations to



Traditional Egyptian foods, including bread, chickpeas and lentils

help those in need. But the donations are slowly decreasing with the rapid rise in prices of all commodities.

A member of one charitable church organisation noticed how there's less money in the donations box located inside the church. As she opened it in Easter, there were a handful of Egyptian pound notes. She said that donations have been affected recently with less money coming in.

Prices of commodities in Egypt have risen doubly, with the devaluation of the Egyptian pound and the war in Ukraine, since many essential food items, such as wheat, are imported. Bread is a staple in every Egyptian home where people eat it for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Even locally produced vegetable prices have soared, not to mention poultry and meat, which have been replaced in many homes by vegetables instead.

Local and international media report that compared to the same month last year, the price of food and beverages in May 2023 increased by 58.9 percent. Prices of meat and poultry surged by 87.9 percent, while prices of dairy products, cheese, and eggs rose by 67.7 percent. Meanwhile, prices of housing, water, electricity, natural gas, and fuel rose by 6.4 percent.

continued overleaf

In response, SAT-7 is providing support through its programming by helping viewers live in faith through the economic challenges. Many churches, such as Kasr El-Dorbara Evangelical Church, are organizing special prayer meetings to pray for Egypt specifically. Other churches are holding spiritual conferences and concerts to engage believers in praise and worship during this time. SAT-7's Arabic channel, which has a studio in Cairo, is not only covering such events live and recording others, it is also addressing the economic crisis on its studio-produced programmes, such as current affairs weekly programme *Different Angle*.

Many viewers contact SAT-7 for personal and spiritual support. Throughout the years, SAT-7 has stood by its viewers throughout the region, showing the love of Christ to all. This Christmas, viewers will be blessed by the live church services and other special programmes on SAT-7, and will be able to connect with our viewer support teams for support and encouragement. Please pray for all those involved in this vital ministry.

St Joseph Choir singing Christmas Carols in Cairo



DECEMBER 11



CHURCHES

Deadly attacks on churches, which have tended to be focused around key Christian events like Easter and Christmas, as well as restrictions on building churches, have left many believers feeling fearful and ostracised.

However, in April 2022, 239 church licences were approved in a positive move from the government towards the Christian community.

Give thanks for the work of the licensing committee; pray that churches will continue to be approved and this will reduce hostility towards the Christian community. Pray for an end to the violence that churches are sometimes subjected to so that believers feel able to meet and worship without fear.



Rehearsals ahead of praise and worship programme As in Heaven at SAT-7 Egypt's studio

DECEMBER 12



JOSEPH'S SILENCE

BIBLE STUDY

Read / Listen to Matthew 1:18-25

Silence can feel pointless, empty and sometimes inescapable. But, as we learn throughout the Bible, God is often in the silence as a “still small voice” (1 Kings 19:12). In the story of Jesus’ birth, Joseph is silent; we never hear him speak in the Gospels, but his actions speak louder than words.

Joseph wants to live in accordance with God’s law but his situation becomes complex. His wife is pregnant and it’s not by him so he decides to quietly divorce her. Here, Joseph could have made a real noise about the situation he finds himself in, publicly divorce Mary and shame her. But out of his love for her and reverence for God, he considers the matter quietly and carefully. In Joseph’s turmoil, we discover that he goes into the deepest silence: he sleeps. As Joseph drifts off, God speaks to him in a dream and his heart is ready for God to show him what he has in store through the birth of Jesus.

When Joseph wakes his response is compelling. He acts and serves God through his commitment to Mary and Jesus. Joseph reminds us of those in situations that seem hopelessly complex and impossible, unable to speak out, get help or escape. But God’s purpose is fulfilled through one silent, willing man.

REFLECTION

QUESTIONS

- 1 Joseph is an honorable man but he finds himself in a scandalous situation. How do you think he felt about what was happening?
- 2 Joseph becomes silent through his troubling situation. When has God spoken clarity to you at a time when you felt confused or uncertain about something that was happening?
- 3 At this busy Advent time, how could you set aside some time to be silent and ready your heart to hear from God?

PRAY

Father God, speak to those who are silent today, overwhelmed by their situation. Men and women across the MENA region much like Joseph: poor, oppressed, unable to speak up. We ask that you reveal your purposes to them and raise up your children to serve you whole-heartedly, through your son Jesus, today. Amen.

Algeria

COUNTRY PROFILE



Christianity flourished here between the fifth and seventh centuries but gradually disappeared after the Arab invasions. Since independence in 1962 a new church was born, chiefly among the Berber

or Amazigh people. Until recently, several thousand new believers were baptised every year. Although the Algerian constitution guarantees freedom of worship, non-Muslims can meet only in buildings licensed for this purpose. Despite many applications, the government licensing commission has yet to issue a single church licence.

- Since November 2017, the Algerian authorities have conducted a campaign that has forcibly closed 20 Protestant churches and ordered several others to cease activities.
- Over the same period, at least twelve Christians have been convicted on faith-related charges, including blasphemy and proselytism. They have received prison sentences of between six months and five years.
- In 2012 SAT-7 began recording services from Algerian churches and continues to air these along with a variety of programmes that feature testimonies, teaching, children's ministry and worship videos.

DECEMBER 13



AUTHORITIES

The Algerian authorities' campaign against the Protestant church, which began in 2017, continues unabated. As well as closing churches, the government is also targeting individual Christians. Men have been arrested for preaching outside church buildings and others for handing out Bibles. Pray for an end to this troubling and dangerous tension between the authorities and the Algerian Church. Ask for God's intervention and that he would find a way to speak even in the silence.

DECEMBER 14



REEMA, VIEWER FROM ALGERIA

"I am an 18-year-old girl from Algeria. I want to be guilt free," Reema told SAT-7's viewer support team. With guidance from a team member, Reema learned about Jesus and how to receive the gift of salvation. She later contacted us to say: "I'm from a different background but I'm happy to be in touch with you. Thank you. I'm very excited that I talked with you. I love you very much. You're truly kind and your words are exceedingly beautiful."

Pray for Reema as she learns more about Jesus; ask that she will come to know Him for herself.



VOICES FROM THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA



FINDING NEW TRADITIONS

Written by Samia Kessai, SAT-7
producer in Algeria

The Algerian church is seeing tremendous growth. "The Kabyle revival", as some call it, was neither inspired by missionaries nor introduced as a foreign movement but was ignited by a small group of faithful believers inside the country. God is using dreams and visions to turn people to Christ. In a country considered 'closed' to the Gospel and where proselytism is illegal under Algerian law, the steadfast devotion of Algeria's Spirit-led Church has overcome the government's resolve to control the growth of its Christian minority. The authorities launched a major campaign against Christians by abruptly closing churches across the nation. These attacks result from massive Church growth in Algeria over the last 40 years. In 2008, there were approximately 10,000 Christians in Algeria. Today there are at least 200,000!

Today the Algerian believers face the same persecution and oppression as in the past. Of course, the closure of the churches in the country has a great impact on the believers who live in fear; some have been arrested and prosecuted because of their faith.

All Christians in Algeria are from a Muslim background. For most of them Christmas and Easter are "new stuff"! This means that they need

time, perhaps even some years to understand these traditions. It's not easy for a Muslim background believer to get rid of some customs and traditions that mark the behavior of many, especially in overwhelmingly religiously conservative societies.

We thank God that during the last decade, the church in Algeria has become open to many eastern and western teachings, which gave the zeal to the leaders to encourage their congregations to celebrate Christmas and Easter. But the challenge remains: how can the celebration of Christmas and Easter become "events" celebrated by families inside homes during this tough time when churches are closed in Algeria?

Given this difficult situation, SAT-7 programmes are like a spring of hope for all ages. SAT-7 offers a variety of programmes that deal with all the daily human concerns. The diversity and variety – discussion, testimony shows, drama, documentaries, Christian teaching and worship, children and youth shows – contribute to the growth of the young church in Algeria.

SAT-7 covers events inside and outside the church, and this has weight in Algeria, making it attractive to Christians and non-Christians. SAT-7 is an open door for isolated Christians here in Algeria, especially after the closure of the churches. The programmes encourage Christians in their faith and give a fresh perspective to those who have questions. And we see through feedback to our programmes and the interactions with viewers that many people came to Christ through SAT-7.

Please pray this Advent that many more in Algeria will learn about the Saviour through our Christmas broadcasts.

DECEMBER 15

Volume On



FREE SOULS

SAT-7 programme *Free Souls* captures the stories of new Christians in Algeria. Now in its sixth series, the producers have filmed the testimonies of over 120 believers who share how they have encountered the Lord, through dreams, visions, other believers and Christian media such as SAT-7.

Each episode is filmed in a unique location around Algeria, giving an accurate depiction of each believer's context. The testimonies shared on *Free Souls* give viewers hope that they, too, can experience the freedom that comes from the miraculous work of the Holy Spirit.

One testimony in particular stands out.

"I was a racist. I disliked Arabs, detested and hated them." Abdel-Nour (pictured overleaf), a pastor in the Kabyle region of Algeria, admitted about the hatred that once consumed him.

Until 2016, his own language, the Kabyle version of Tamazight, was not even an official language in his country. As a young Berber, or Amazigh, he resented this and the national policies that made his people second-class citizens. Growing up in a

society where Amazigh people were neglected and sometimes experienced violence from Arab rulers, Abdel-Nour spent his childhood and teenage years carrying hatred.

But God had other plans for Abdel-Nour: to be a messenger of reconciliation and love even to his Arab enemies. His previous image of God was that He was severe and cruel. But when he met some people from a local church, things began to change.

"They did not stop talking about Jesus Christ," he recalls. "I was a curious person, so I went with them to the church. I noticed that their faces were shining with love, a love I hadn't even experienced in my family."

Abdel-Nour was baptised, and over time, the Holy Spirit softened his heart even to the people and culture he had despised. "I began to love hymns in Arabic, a language that I hated before. God urged me to love what I used to hate." Today Abdel-Nour is truly an Amazigh – a "free person" in Christ.



Abdel-Nour shared his testimony on SAT-7 programme, Free Souls

SAT-7 is a voice of hope for minorities, and it is important to help Amazigh believers to discover and grow in their new identity in Christ. At a time when many church doors in Algeria are closed, the need for dedicated Algerian broadcasts is clear.

Praise God for this opportunity through SAT-7 and ask that He will encourage new Christians in their faith.

DECEMBER 16



RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Pastor Ibn Aymara Saeed from Algeria said: “We’ll keep meeting in the courtyard until we’re arrested or beaten. This is our expression of protest against the closure of the church. During summer, despite the extreme heat and sweating, the believers held onto their fervour and faith. But it is still difficult. We know that the state and the Algerian people and Muslims are not our enemy. The only thing we want from the government is to recognise us globally, to allow freedom of religion, and to let us practise our faith within the law.” Join Algerian Christians in praying for freedom and recognition.

DECEMBER 17



CHRISTIAN RESOURCES

Bibles and other Christian materials are in short supply in Algeria because the government tightly restricts the numbers that can be imported. In addition, a 2006 law criminalised the publishing or distributing of any materials “which aim to undermine the faith of a Muslim”. Pray that people in Algeria will find their spiritual nourishment through programmes on SAT-7 and that access to Christian resources and Bibles will open up.



DECEMBER 18



THE SHEPHERD'S CALL

BIBLE STUDY

Read / Listen to Luke 2:8-20

The shepherds were met by a whole host of angels – what a terrifying and exciting experience! What would be your first instinct? Run away? Faint? Join in the worship?

The shepherds were not at the centre of society; they were outsiders, on the fringes, just going about their work. No one else would have thought to share important news with them but, here, we see they were valued by God. He chose to share the good news with them. Their reaction is so immediate, so compelling. They go to Bethlehem to see Jesus and when they return, they are in awe, called to worship and share all that they had seen and heard.

There are many things that hold us back from sharing the good news of Jesus. Remember that first time you encountered Him; perhaps you immediately wanted to share what you had experienced. But the pressures and judgement from those around us can fill us with fear, quietening our response. For Christians in the MENA region, sharing the Gospel can be incredibly challenging and even illegal in some places. They risk being ostracised from their families and communities; arrest and imprisonment; violence and even death.

Nevertheless, God calls us, as he did the shepherds, to share His son Jesus with the world. This season, ask God to help you become like the shepherds. Praise Him, glorify Him, and share all that He has done for you.

REFLECTION

QUESTIONS

- 1 What are you most inspired by in this part of the Christmas story?
- 2 The shepherds respond to what they see and hear by praising God. What are you praising God for today?
- 3 How could you share the good news of Jesus this Advent season? Ask God to fill you with His Holy Spirit and give you boldness and confidence to do this.

PRAY

Loving Heavenly Father, give us a fresh perspective on all that you have done for us through your son Jesus. There is such joy in knowing that Jesus came to earth for each of us and we praise and worship you for this incredible gift. Fill us and all your children in the MENA with your Holy Spirit today and help us to share the Gospel with those around us this Advent season. Amen.

Türkiye

COUNTRY PROFILE



Freedom of religion may be recognised in Türkiye's constitution but non-Muslims face restrictions,

especially those not named in a 1923 treaty that includes only Armenian Apostolic Orthodox Christians, Greek Orthodox Christians and Jews. Public opinion, reinforced by the state, is that to be Turkish is to be Muslim. Many regard non-Muslims as a threat to national unity.

- Despite the restrictions, Protestant churches have multiplied since the 1960s. They now total around 100, mostly small congregations. These churches have been able to register legally since 2005.
- Over the last five years authorities cancelled the residency and deported or barred re-entry to around 75 expatriate Christians who led or assisted Protestant churches.
- Church leaders have sometimes faced death threats, though the most serious violence in recent years was the murder of five young men at a Christian publishing house in Malatya in 2007.

DECEMBER 19



DISCRIMINATION

Christians face significant discrimination in Türkiye as there is increasing religious nationalism in this mostly Islamic country. They are often denied visas and employment, and are viewed with suspicion. Pray for Christians in Türkiye as they live in this unwelcoming and hostile environment. Ask that they will enjoy the same rights, opportunities and treatment as other Turks.

DECEMBER 20



CONVERSION

It is legal to convert to Christianity in Türkiye but those who leave Islam to follow Christ are often ostracised by their families and communities. Many end up leading a double life or hiding their new faith completely. Pray for those who feel unable to express their faith, silenced by the society around them. Ask that the Lord will fill them with boldness, wisdom and opportunities to share His love.



VOICES FROM THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

QUIET FAITH

Written by Gülsüm from SAT-7 TÜRK

Although it is not illegal to be Christian in Türkiye, believers often face pressure from within their communities. This is especially the case for those who convert to Christianity from another religion. When you change religion in a predominantly non-Christian country, people around you, even close relatives, criticise or exclude you. Changing religion is perceived as a betrayal to both family and country. For this reason, there are many Christians in Türkiye who hide their faith from their families and communities. Unfortunately, this is something we hear a lot from people in local churches. SAT-7 viewers also write to us and ask for prayer about pressure from their families.

Christmas can therefore be an especially lonely time for many Turkish Christians. In Türkiye, Christmas is celebrated among families and in local churches. Special clothes are bought for the children for the occasion. People go to church and cook special meals. We pray together. Everyone is in a spirit of festive joy.

It is also an opportunity to celebrate the different cultures in the country; the customs of Armenians and Greeks are different from each other, while Turkish Christians have their own customs. Churches even use different words for "Christmas";



On the set of SAT-7 TÜRK programme, Let's Talk

some call it "Noel", while others say "Doğuş". But these differences do not separate us; we are grateful for the cultural richness in Türkiye. At SAT-7 TÜRK, we always try to reflect this richness on our screens. Although from different cultures, we celebrate the birth of Jesus with one heart, united by our faith in Him.

We also haven't forgotten our brothers and sisters in the earthquake region, who are a long way from getting their lives back the way it was before disaster hit. In their celebrations this Christmas, we will see how people can still be grateful after they lose all their earthly possessions – and as a channel, we will continue to amplify their voices.

For those who have to keep their faith quiet this Christmas – and throughout the year – SAT-7 TÜRK's programmes and viewer support are a lifeline, and help people to feel connected to the body of Christ. We broadcast sermons from pastors and priests of local churches. We highlight the Christian history in Türkiye and so inform the non-Christians here about this heritage. And people are responding every day. There are many people from different faiths writing to us from different parts of Türkiye. And we pray for them all.

Please join us in praying for SAT-7 viewers in Türkiye, especially those who feel silenced and isolated at this time.

DECEMBER 21

Volume On



HOMEMADE

Homemade aims to inspire female viewers all over Türkiye to be creative, realise their full potential and share their stories to help others.

While secular TV channels in Türkiye have many programmes for women, they are often outdated or focus only on marriage problems. *Homemade* brings an exciting contrast by raising awareness of issues faced by women in Türkiye today, and by offering biblically-inspired advice. Producer Deniz Çolak said, "Speaking about these issues will help us show God's love to more people. We want to make programmes, such as *Homemade*, available to every citizen in our country. If we can touch just one person's life, it will have been worth it."

SAT-7 wants to encourage women to develop skills and interests that will boost their confidence. "We are speaking to Turkish women who have become lawyers, doctors, psychologists, researchers," says Deniz.

"We want our audience to be inspired by these courageous women, who stand on their own two feet despite the struggles they have faced. We are broadening our audience's horizons and helping them dream big."

Pray that Homemade will speak to women in Türkiye, especially those who feel isolated and under-valued. Ask that they will come to know their true God-given worth.



Homemade host
Sema Deniz Bakir

DECEMBER 22



EARTHQUAKE IMPACT

In February this year, Türkiye was devastated by two powerful earthquakes. Over 55,000 people lost their lives and approaching 130,000 were injured. Estimates are that close to 18 million people have been impacted. The earthquakes worsened Türkiye's existing financial crisis, putting additional strain on the cost of living for ordinary Turkish people.

In the midst of the destruction, the Turkish Church has been hard at work. Local churches and Christians immediately responded with the love of Jesus, providing emergency food, shelter, first aid and emotional support to their grieving communities. Pray that this loving witness will soften hearts towards Türkiye's Christians, and pray for ongoing relief efforts.



DECEMBER 23



UMUT, VIEWER FROM TÜRKKEY

“ I have been distant from the church for a long time. But one day I was so troubled that I wanted to pray, and I realised that I wasn't able to pray! I felt terrible and I was crying because of it. I couldn't even remember the prayer of the Lord, which I knew. Then a voice came from one of the TVs in the other room, reading the prayer of our Father in heaven. I ran and looked and saw SAT-7 TÜRK. You were praying, and I accompanied you by crying! My troubles were gone. I'm so glad I have you. May the Lord bless you! There are so many young people watching you, believe me when I say it. Your service is invaluable.”

Praise God for speaking to Umut through SAT-7 TÜRK during this time of crisis. Pray that Umut will continue to hear from God and will find encouragement and discipleship through more of SAT-7's programmes.



DECEMBER 24



THE WISE MEN'S WORSHIP

BIBLE STUDY

Read / Listen to Matthew 2:1-12

Expectant, excited and extravagant worship. This sums up the wise men's worship and what we can learn from their response to seeking and finding the true Messiah.

Expectant. These men were awaiting something; they didn't know what or who, but they were ready, seeking the truth. When they travelled, after the birth of Jesus, perhaps over a year later, they were expectant. They travelled many miles because they were hopeful of finding something incredible at the end of their journey.

Excited. Well, they certainly weren't disappointed! When they met Jesus, they "rejoiced exceedingly with great joy." They were overcome with excitement about meeting King Jesus. The account also tells us they "fell down and worshiped Him." Scholarly men, known throughout the land for being well-educated, impressive people, fell to their knees in worship – showing us how powerful Jesus' presence is.

And finally, they were extravagant in their worship. They brought with them three marvelous gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. They brought their very best, leaving all else behind to worship Jesus.

The wise men's response is a challenge to us all: does our worship look like this? SAT-7 knows that worship can come at such a cost for many who raise their voices in praise across the Middle East. Thank God for the freedom we have to worship this Advent and pray for our brothers and sisters in Christ who long to worship expectantly, excitedly and extravagantly.

REFLECTION

QUESTIONS

- 1 When was the last time you came to worship expectant of Jesus?
- 2 What does your worship look like? Have you surrendered yourself in praise of Jesus, the King?
- 3 How could you be extravagant in what you give to God this season? Are you willing to give Him the worship and praise He deserves?

PRAY

Father God, thank you for these wise men who remind us that we can come to you totally surrendered and give you all our praise. Help us to be expectant, excited and extravagant in our worship. We give you all the praise for your Son Jesus and we worship you with our very best. Amen.

DECEMBER 25



GOD SPEAKS THROUGH JESUS

REFLECTION

Read / Listen to John 1:1-5, 14

The carol “Silent Night” wonderfully captures the quiet simplicity of Jesus’ nativity, and it calms and comforts millions of people who sing and hear it every year. But of course the events of that night recounted in Luke’s Gospel are far from silent. An angel announces the birth of a saviour and king; a multitude of the heavenly host gives glory to God; shepherds rush to see the baby, telling the good news and praising God, while those who hear their story are amazed. For Luke it is a night not of silence, but of excited and dramatic words.

And in that night a more profound word could also be heard: the definitive Word of God spoken to the world. In John’s Gospel we read of one called “the Word”, who existed in the beginning, who was with God and Himself God. Through Him God spoke creation into being; through Him God brought life and light to the world. This Word is God’s supreme self-expression, in whom God makes Himself known to all people.

The Christmas message is that the Word has now become embodied in a human being and has lived in our midst. In this person, both human and divine, God has supremely and finally disclosed Himself to the world. The glory of God – His

divine being in its splendour and majesty – is revealed in the words and works of Jesus Christ, as the nature of a father is exhibited in his only son. And the Word is full of the divine grace and truth that sets us free and brings us life.

In this prayer guide, we have read about the many ways in which the words of Christians in the MENA are silenced by those who do not want to hear the message they proclaim. We have also seen how SAT-7 is giving them words again, both by providing them with a platform to express themselves, and by speaking up publicly on their behalf.

The Word of God cannot be chained, whatever penalties His people may receive for speaking for Him. He cannot be thwarted but will accomplish the purpose for which He was sent, despite the sufferings of those who confess His name. He cannot be silenced, however hard persecutors try to shout down the churches’ witness to Him. And even when the words of the MENA’s Christians are stifled or suppressed for a while, He still speaks, in their patient endurance and unshakable faithfulness, and to sustain them in their trials.

May the Word that was spoken on that “silent night” in Bethlehem long ago sound in your hearts too this Christmas time.

PRAY

Word of God, as we celebrate your coming into the world, graciously speak to us and your people in the MENA, and speak through us to share your light and life with the world you came to save. Amen.

For family, group and
church resources, visit

[www.sat7uk.org/
advent-resources](http://www.sat7uk.org/advent-resources)



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